

**Frequently Asked Questions  
on the City of Birmingham's Face Covering Ordinance  
May 1, 2020**

**Must a face covering be worn in Birmingham?**

Yes. As of May 1, if you are conducting business, taking transit, getting healthcare, entering a facility that is allowed to stay open, working an essential job that interacts with the public, or at any other time that you are interacting with persons who are not part of your household, then you must cover your nose and mouth.

**Why are face coverings required?**

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has determined that a significant number of people who have the novel coronavirus virus (COVID-19) are not showing symptoms. These individuals can spread the virus to others through speaking, coughing and sneezing. The widespread use of cloth coverings can slow the spread of the virus by reducing the instance of the virus being spread by people who do not even know that they have the virus. The primary role of the cloth face covering is to reduce the release of infectious particles into the air.

**How well do cloth face coverings work to prevent the spread of COVID-19?**

Remember, cloth face coverings are not a substitute for physical distancing, washing hands or staying home when ill, but they may be helpful when combined with other primary interventions. According to the CDC, evidence suggests that use of cloth face coverings could help reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

**What guidance do you have for using a face covering?**

It is important to keep your nose and mouth covered. Lowering the covering from your nose and mouth while talking defeats the purpose of wearing the face covering since you can spread the virus while talking. If you must adjust your mask, you should wash your hands before and after doing so or use a sanitizing gel or wipe before and after.

**When should I wear a cloth face covering?**

Wear a cloth face covering over your nose and mouth when you are out in public in Birmingham, especially around people. Wearing a cloth face covering does not eliminate the need to physically distance yourself from others or to wash your hands frequently.

Face coverings are not needed at home, in your car alone or if you are only with members of your household or if you are exercising outdoors (i.e. walking, hiking, bicycling or running).

This also includes individuals working alone in separate office spaces or in non-public workplaces where there is a more than adequate social distancing area, based on the size of and number of people in the space (indoors or out of doors).

It is not necessary for individuals videoing presentations for live or recorded public viewing to wear face coverings or masks for the presentation where there are less than 10 participants, no live public audience and adequate social distancing available.

You do not need to wear a face covering when alone outside of your home or vehicle and not around other people from other households. Be prepared to put a face covering on when encountering people from other households, especially in a group of 10 or more or a group of any size where consistent 6 feet social distancing is not possible.

### **Which groups are not required to cover their face?**

All individuals are asked to wear face coverings in public places, while shopping or riding on transit. However, there are some special exceptions:

- **Exercise**
- **Children under age 2**
- **People receiving medical or dental examinations or treatment**
- **Health and safety reasons:**

### **Exercise**

People who are engaging in outdoor exercise alone or with members of their own household are not required to wear a face covering. You must wear a face covering when interacting with people from other households, other than just passing by while performing your exercise.

### **Children**

According to guidance from the CDC, children under 2 years old must not wear a face covering because it may pose a choking, strangulation or suffocation hazard. Alternatives, such as a baby seat, carrier or stroller covered with a light cloth that does not affect the child's ability to breathe may be used if taking an infant or young toddler in public. Parents and caregivers should use their best judgment in determining when and where their children over the age of 2 should wear a face covering.

Parents must understand that the CDC and other health professionals think that there is evidence that children may be asymptomatic carriers of COVID-19. Face coverings for children are recommended to reduce the chance that they are spreading the virus, despite having no symptoms. Parents should consider this, along with their knowledge of their children, including their maturity level and/or special health concerns, when taking their children in public without a face covering. Any parents with particular concerns about their children's ability to safely wear a face covering (including consideration of the Health & Safety Reasons listed below), are encouraged to consult with their children's pediatrician or other health care provider.

Daycares and other child care facilities must provide parents with their procedures for using face coverings or masks. If use of face coverings or masks are not possible, due to supervision of multiple children, the facility must use sanitary and hygienic practices to the maximum extent possible. Use of face coverings or masks are strongly encouraged.

### **Persons Receiving Medical or Dental Examinations or Treatment**

Persons who are receiving medical or dental exams or treatment where there is need to exam the mouth and nose area are exempted. They must follow the directions of the facility where they receive the service.

### **Health & Safety Reasons**

If a face covering poses greater risk to an individual's mental or physical health than not wearing one, then an individual is not required to wear a face covering.

*Examples of when a face covering is not required for health and safety include but are not limited to:*

- Documentation from a medical professional that you do not have to cover your face
- You have trouble breathing
- You are unable to remove a face covering without assistance
- You have a physical disability that prevents you from wearing a face covering
- You have sensory disabilities (such as autism)
- You are deaf and use facial and mouth movements, including persons interpreting for groups (You can remove your face covering while signing and encourage interlocutors to do the same.)
- You have mental health challenges that preclude you from covering your face

*Other exceptions for health and safety include hazards in one's work environment. Examples include, but are not limited to:*

- Working from ladders or at height
- When other respiratory protection is required
- When operating heavy machinery and the mask impairs hearing or communication
- Moving heavy equipment such that it could be constituted as exercise

Face coverings should be worn in common spaces like elevators, restrooms and kitchen areas. However, if business is conducted with limited public interaction or on a secure site, employers should use their best judgment in determining where face coverings should be worn. It is still important to use social distancing to the maximum extent possible.

### **What is a cloth face covering?**

A cloth face covering is a material that covers the nose and mouth. It can be secured to the head with ties or straps or simply wrapped around the lower face. It can be made of a variety of materials, such as cotton, silk, or linen. A cloth face covering may be factory-made, sewn by hand or can be improvised from household items such as scarfs, T-shirts, sweatshirts, etc. These are best made with fabric and allows for breathing without restriction. At this time clear plastic face shields are not considered as substitutes for face coverings or masks; however, face shields may be worn with a face covering or mask.

### **What are my face covering options?**

*Acceptable, reusable face covering options include:*

- Bandana, scarf
- Neck gaiter or homemade face covering
- Tightly woven fabric, such as cotton T-shirts and some type of towels
- Again, a medical grade face covering or store-bought face covering is not required
- For information on how to make a face covering, visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

### **How should I care for a cloth face covering?**

It's a good idea to wash your cloth face covering frequently, ideally daily. Have a bag or container to store cloth face coverings until they can be laundered with detergent and hot water and dried on a hot cycle. It is not recommended that bleach be used to clean face coverings because bleach may damage or break down the fibers of the cloth used in the mask. If you must re-wear your cloth face covering before washing it, wash your hands immediately after putting it back on and avoid touching your face. *Discard cloth face coverings that:*

- No longer cover the nose and mouth
- Have stretched out or have damaged ties or straps
- Cannot stay on the face
- Have holes or tears in the fabric

### **Can I use an N95 respirator or clinical mask instead?**

Purchasing a respirator or clinical mask intended for the healthcare setting and emergency responders, such as paramedics (including N95 respirators and clinical masks), is strongly discouraged.

Medical respirators and clinical masks are worn for protection by healthcare staff, first responders and those workers who provide care to a person who might have COVID-19 or other communicable diseases. Since the intent of the face cover is to primarily protect others rather than the person wearing the cover, a clinical face mask is not necessary.

**How do I make a cloth face covering?**

The link below from the CDC provides information on how to create different types of cloth face coverings by using items commonly found around the house. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>